

From Historian to Theologian: Milestones in Markan Scholarship

William L. Lane

[p.601]

Prior to the emergence of modern criticism the Gospel of Mark was almost totally neglected. In the patristic period it was so thoroughly overshadowed by the Gospel of Matthew that in the late fifth century Victor of Antioch complained of the total absence of commentaries on Mark. To supply what was lacking Victor made a compilation from earlier exegetical writings of Origen, Titus of Bostra, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria, who had commented incidentally on Mark in the course of their expositions of Matthew, Luke, and John.¹ The venerable Bede prepared a commentary on Mark in the eighth century, and there were isolated attempts to expound the Gospel in the Middle Ages and after the Reformation. The rarity of ancient commentaries on the Gospel reflected the commonly received opinion that Mark was only an abstract of Matthew.² This persuasion was scarcely challenged until the nineteenth century, when the conviction that Mark provided the key for solving the Synoptic problem introduced the period of modern criticism.

What altered the earlier situation was a series of literary-critical studies which led to the assertion that Mark was in fact the earliest of the Gospels.³ Karl Lachmann called attention to the order of events in the Synoptic Gospels as providing the simplest, fixed point from which to discuss the relationships between the Gospels. In an article published in 1835⁴ he demonstrated that when Matthew and Luke preserve tradition also found in Mark, the order of events in Matthew and Luke corresponds closely, but that no such correspondence in order exists when the two evangelists use source material not found in Mark. Because Lachmann did not believe that Matthew and Luke could have made use of Mark, he postulated that all three evangelists drew upon an older written or oral source. The argument from order indicated, however, that Mark followed the older source with greater fidelity than did Matthew or Luke. This persuaded Lachmann that Mark preserved the evangelical tradition about Jesus at an earlier stage than the other Gospels.

C. H. Weisse found in Lachmann's investigation a compelling argument for Markan priority. In a lengthy study published in 1838 he argued that

[p.602]

¹ Cf. H. Smith, "The Sources of Victor of Antioch's Commentary on Mark," *Journal of Theological Studies*, XIX (1918), 350-370.

² Augustine (ca. A.D. 400) gave classic formulation to this opinion in his reflections upon the Synoptic Gospels, "Concerning the Agreement of the Evangelists," 1,2 (4). See D. L. Dungan, "Mark—The Abridgement of Matthew and Luke," *Perspective*, XI (1970), 51-97.

³ The first indication of a new direction for Gospel research was the Gottingen dissertation of J. B. Koppe, entitled *Marcus non epitomator Matthaei* [Mark, not the Epitomist of Matthew] (1782). Koppe demonstrated that Mark does not follow the order of Matthew slavishly; the Markan order frequently agrees with Luke. His investigation posed the question why Luke should prefer the order of Mark to that of Matthew if, in fact, Matthew was the earliest apostolic account of Jesus' ministry.

⁴ K. Lachmann, "De Ordine narrationum in evangeliiis synopticis" [The Order of the Narration of Events in the Synoptic Gospels], *Theologische Studien and Kritiken*, VIII (1835), 570ff.

Mark was the common source for the narrative tradition in Matthew and Luke.⁵ Although he was not prepared to recognize the historical character of all of the tradition found in Mark, he asserted that an outline of the life of Jesus could be constructed from the Markan account which could be assigned to history. Weisse's work provided the basis for the development of "the Markan hypothesis," that Mark was the earliest Gospel upon which the later Gospels drew. As the account which stood closest in point of time to the original eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, it provided a reliable source for a knowledge of the historical Jesus.

This critical position was refined and given a classic formulation in H. J. Holtzmann's publication of his investigation of the Synoptic Gospels in 1863.⁶ For the generation which followed Holtzmann the Markan hypothesis was an accepted canon of research. Although the later evangelists may reflect the developing theology of the Church, Mark's simple, uncomplicated presentation of Jesus was based upon well-attested, early and reliable tradition. For the framework necessary to life-of-Jesus research one could turn with confidence to the Gospel of Mark.

That summarizes the situation in Markan criticism at the turn of the century. Christians turned to the Gospel of Mark because it was a reliable historical source for reconstructing the ministry of Jesus. The vivid realism of the Markan narratives encouraged a confidence in the credibility of the record. The prevailing conviction that Mark put us in touch with the historical Jesus could appeal to the broad support of a scholarly consensus that the evangelist Mark was an historian, not a theologian, and that his Gospel falls into the category of history, not theology.

That consensus no longer exists. It is now customary to recognize that Mark is not simply an historian. He is a theologian of the first rank.⁷ His Gospel is by no means a simple, uncomplicated presentation of the life of Jesus; it is impregnated with theology. Mark reflects distinctive christological and theological perspectives which put us in touch with the convictions of the community for which he prepared his Gospel in the seventh decade of the first century. The developments which account for this altered understanding of the role of the evangelist—from historian to theologian—may be traced in a number of epoch-making studies. They constitute the milestones in Markan scholarship in the twentieth century.

WILLIAM WREDE

The common conviction that Mark was essentially an historian was rudely challenged by William Wrede, whose studies convinced him that even the earliest Gospel does not carry us back directly to Jesus himself. In a

[p.603]

⁵ C. H. Weisse, *Die evangelische Geschichte Kritisch and philosophisch bearbeitet* [The Gospel Accounts Critically and Philosophically Treated] (2 vols.; Leipzig: Breitkopf & Hartel, 1838). Weisse also theorized that Matthew and Luke drew upon another common source which preserved the tradition of the sayings of Jesus. He thus laid the groundwork for the "Two Document Hypothesis" (i.e. Mark and Q).

⁶ H. J. Holtzmann, *Die Synoptischen Evangelien: Ihr Ursprung and geschichtlicher Charakter* [The Synoptic Gospels: their Origin and Historical Character] (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Hartel, 1863).

⁷ The shift in critical opinion is reflected in the title of Ralph Martin's survey of Markan scholarship, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (London: Paternoster Press, 1972).

volume published in 1908⁸ he called attention systematically to the secrecy phenomena in Mark's Gospel. The demons who seek to make known the identity of Jesus are silenced (Mk. 1:25, 34; 3:11-12). Secrecy is imposed after the accomplishment of some of Jesus' mighty works (1:44; 5:43; 7:36, 8-26). Following Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi and during the descent from the Mount of Transfiguration the disciples are charged to tell no one that Jesus is the Messiah (8:30; 9:9). Jesus withdrew from the multitudes and embarked upon travels during which he desired to remain unknown (7:24; 9:30). He reserved his instruction concerning "the secret of the kingdom of God" and related matters for the disciples alone (4:10-12; 7:17-23; 8:31; 9:28-29, 31, 33-35; 10:33-34; 13:3-37). In short, Wrede urged, Jesus is represented in Mark as enjoining secrecy about his miracles and messiahship in situations where the injunctions to silence appear to be inappropriate and arbitrary. The total impression created by the Gospel of Mark is that Jesus intentionally concealed his messiahship from all except those within the inner circle of the disciples, and even they failed to understand his office and identity. Only with the resurrection did the perception of his true character begin to be grasped. This impression, Wrede argued, is a Markan construction. The "messianic secret" is a literary device which originated in the early church to account for the absence of any awareness that Jesus was the Messiah in the historical tradition. Recognition that the secrecy phenomenon is a theological construction provides a unitary explanation for the injunctions to silence in the Gospel.

Wrede located the source of the idea of a secret about the messiahship in a contrast between what the Church came to think of Jesus as a result of the resurrection and the manner in which his life had been understood during his ministry. No one considered Jesus to be the Messiah prior to the resurrection because Jesus "actually did not represent himself as Messiah."⁹ When the Church came to *think* of Jesus after his resurrection as Messiah they explained the absence of any explicit declaration of his messiahship by Jesus during his ministry with the proposal that Jesus had secretly revealed his messiahship. In this way the non-messianic historical tradition of Jesus' ministry was harmonized with the theological conviction of the Church that Jesus was the Messiah. Although the idea of the messianic secret did not originate with Mark,¹⁰ the evangelist was the first to edit the tradition so thoroughly that his Gospel is impregnated with this theological construct.

Mark's Gospel, accordingly, is an amalgam of historical tradition and theological interpretation which has no support in history. The historical content concerns Jesus' appearance in Galilee as an itinerant teacher surrounded by a circle of disciples who accompanied him on his journeys. Jesus purportedly performed miracles and exorcised demons. He associated

[p.604]

⁸ W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* [The Messianic Secret in the Gospels] (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901; reissued, 1963); English translation by J. C. G. Greig, *The Messianic Secret* (London: James Clarke, 1971). Wrede concerned himself primarily with the Gospel of Mark (pp. 9-149). For a discussion of his ideas see V. Taylor, "W. Wrede's The Messianic Secret in the Gospels," *Expository Times*, LXV (1953-1954), 246-250; G. H. Boobyer, "The Secrecy Motif in St. Mark's Gospel," *New Testament Studies*, VI (1959-1960), 225-235; J. D. G. Dunn, "The Messianic Secret in Mark," *Tyndale Bulletin*, XXI (1970), 92-117; W. C. Robinson, Jr., "The Quest for Wrede's Secret Messiah," *Interpretation*, XXVII (1973), 10-30.

⁹ W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, p. 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

freely with tax collectors and other despised persons, and assumed an attitude of freedom in relation to the Law. Consequently, he was opposed by the Pharisees and the Jewish authorities, who eventually secured his death with the cooperation of the Roman provincial government.¹¹

Mark superimposed upon this historical tradition the definite non-historical dogmatic construction that Jesus had intentionally veiled his true identity during the course of his earthly ministry. Mark's purpose was to present Jesus as the bearer of a special messianic office conferred by God. Since no one supposed that Jesus was the Messiah prior to the resurrection, and since nothing was known of any open claim on Jesus' part to be the Messiah, Mark's Gospel must be recognized as a bold attempt to give a messianic interpretation to the non-messianic character of Jesus' earthly ministry. Wrede's conclusion was startling:

Only pale remnants (of historical evidence for the actual life of Jesus) survive in what is a suprahistorical interpretation based on faith. In that sense Mark's Gospel belongs to the history of dogma.¹²

The literary form of the Gospel creates the impression that it is a record of history. In point of fact, Wrede urged, it is theology cast in a narrative style of writing. The Gospel of Mark constitutes the first chapter in a history of Christian dogma.

Wrede's reading of the Gospel of Mark has not gone unchallenged. It is widely recognized currently that the "secrecy" phenomena in Mark resist a unitary explanation. A single example must suffice to illustrate the point. Wrede found in Mark 5:43 his most striking evidence that the secrecy phenomenon was an arbitrary schematic construction of the evangelist. Since it was widely known that Jairus's daughter had died, it would be impossible to keep the news concerning her from those who came for her funeral. An injunction to silence was impractical.¹³ It is clear, however, that this context lends no support to the theory of secret messiahship, as Wrede conceived it. Fundamental to the narrative is the remarkable disclosure of Jesus' authority to the parents of the girl and to the disciples. The "secret" is, accordingly, a "witnessed secret" which is to be kept from others whom Jesus excluded. The accent of the narrative alternates between disclosure of the messiahship and veiling. The motivation for the injunction to silence may be found in the rank unbelief of those who had ridiculed Jesus with their scornful laughter (5:40-42). It is clear throughout Mark that Jesus revealed his messiahship only with reserve. It is appropriate to this consistent pattern of behavior that he was unwilling to make himself known to the raucous, unbelieving group that had gathered outside Jairus's house. He did not permit them to witness the saving action by which the girl was restored to her parents, and he directed that it should continue to remain

[p.605]

unknown to those outside. He recognized that the responsibility of the parents in this regard could not continue indefinitely. When the child appeared in public the facts would speak for themselves. By then, however, Jesus would have departed and could no longer be subject to ostentatious acclaim. Mark's point is not that Jesus' miracles are secret, but that their

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 48f.

significance can be discerned only in the light of Jesus' office as the one who brings the kingdom of God.

The nerve-center of "the messianic secret" is the necessity of the passion in the plan of God. This is made indelibly clear in Mark 8:31, where Jesus clarifies what it means to acknowledge that he is the Messiah. His solemn pronouncement follows immediately on verse 30 as the explanation of the stern command not to speak to anyone concerning Jesus' identity. It was not necessary that the people recognize that he is the Messiah until he had fulfilled his messianic vocation through death and resurrection (9:9; 13:9f.; 14:9). This is the one occasion in Mark that an injunction to silence is explained, and it provides the key to all of the previous injunctions to silence. The necessity of the passion in obedience to the will of God accounts for the so-called secrecy phenomena in the Gospel. The "messianic secret" is God's intention to provide salvation through a suffering Savior who is identified with the people by his free decision to bear the burden of judgment on human rebellion.¹⁴ The repeated injunctions to silence throughout the Gospel of Mark are an expression of Jesus' fidelity to the divine plan of salvation.

Wrede's achievement, nevertheless, was considerable. His legacy to the contemporary study of the Gospel of Mark lies in the discovery of clear theological assertion in the Markan account. Wrede's understanding of Mark is presupposed by the leading exponents of form criticism, including Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann. Its leading features reappear in the studies of R. H. Lightfoot¹⁵ and T. A. Burkill.¹⁶ Although Wrede did not convince everyone, his conclusion that Mark was clearly *interpreted history* appeared to most scholars to be unassailable. To this extent his work is the first and major milestone in the recognition of Mark as a theologian.

KARL LUDWIG SCHMIDT

Another study appeared in 1901 which reinforced Wrede's view that Mark is not uninterpreted factual history. Albert Schweitzer released a study of the life of Jesus¹⁷ in which he sought to demonstrate that the Gospel of Mark is not a closely connected historical narrative at all. It is actually composed of a number of independent units of tradition. Schweitzer expressed his conviction with characteristic vigor:

[p.606]

¹⁴ G. Minette de Tillesse, *Le secret messianique dans l'évangile de Marc* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1968), p. 321: "The messianic secret expresses in Mark the irrevocable and free decision of Jesus to embrace his passion, because this is the divine will.... If Jesus had allowed his glory as Son of God to shine everywhere, if he had permitted to the crowds their delirious enthusiasm, if he had allowed the demons to howl their servile confession, if he had permitted the apostles to divulge everywhere their sensational discovery, the passion would have been rendered impossible and the destiny of Jesus would have issued in triumph, but a triumph which would have been wholly human (Ch. 8:33) and which would not have accomplished the divine plan of salvation." Cf. pp. 415-417.

¹⁵ R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935).

¹⁶ T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation, An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963).

¹⁷ A. Schweitzer, *Das Messianitäts- und Leidensgeheimnis: Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu* [The Secret of the Messiahship and Passion: A Sketch of the Life of Jesus] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1901). English translation by W. Lowrie, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1914).

The material with which it has hitherto been usual to solder the sections [of Mark] together into a life of Jesus will not stand the temperature test. Exposed to the cold air of critical skepticism it cracks; when the furnace of eschatology is heated to a certain point the solderings melt. In both cases the sections all fall apart.¹⁸

In this conclusion Schweitzer anticipated the emergence of form criticism and more particularly, the work of Karl Ludwig Schmidt.

Form criticism is the study of biblical tradition which may be presumed to have existed originally in oral form. Its concern is to penetrate behind the sources which literary criticism may identify to the preliterate stage of the tradition. It seeks to describe what took place as the tradition was transmitted orally from person to person and from community to community. Its special concern is the modification of the tradition by the life and thought of the Christian community. In the New Testament form criticism has concerned itself primarily with the investigation of the Synoptic Gospels. It has focused upon the individual units of tradition in the Gospels in an effort to distinguish those strata which reflect the concerns of the Church from the stratum which might be thought to go back to Jesus himself or to some contemporary source in Judaism or Hellenism.

Form criticism was developed as a critical tool by Hermann Gunkel, an Old Testament scholar. In his commentary on Genesis (1901) he broke new ground by attempting to recover the earliest form of the tradition which was given its final literary expression in Genesis. Gunkel was convinced that the method he had developed for identifying and classifying smaller units of narrative, didactic, and liturgical tradition behind the literary text was applicable to the study of the Synoptic Gospels as well. This insight was developed by one of his pupils, Martin Dibelius, in a study of the primitive Christian tradition concerning John the Baptist.¹⁹ In this early work Dibelius expressed two methodological conclusions concerning the Synoptic Gospels and the tradition embedded in them which became programmatic for form criticism: (1) the evangelists are not authors but collectors and preservers of tradition, who had edited their material by adding such items as time and place references, connecting links, and summary reports; (2) both sayings and narrative material existed in fixed oral forms before they received literary expression by the evangelists who wrote the Gospels. The second of these insights Dibelius developed himself in a brochure dealing with "The Form Criticism of the Gospels" published in 1919,²⁰ in which he distinguished between five "forms" which he could recognize behind the literary expression of the Synoptic Gospels. The first insight was developed by his own student, K. L. Schmidt, in a monograph devoted to the framework of the Synoptic Gospels.²¹

[p.607]

¹⁸ A. Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (London: A. & C. Black, 1910), p. 331.

¹⁹ M. Dibelius, *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer* [The Primitive Christian Tradition Concerning John the Baptist] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911).

²⁰ M. Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* [The Form Criticism of the Gospels] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1919). English translation of the second German edition (1933) by B. L. Woolf, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934). The third German edition (1959) contains an essay by G. Iber tracing the development of form criticism since Dibelius. For a useful introduction to the discipline of form criticism, see E. V. McKnight, *What is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969).

²¹ K. L. Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* [The Framework of the Story of Jesus] (Berlin: Trowitzsch, 1919; reissued 1964).

Schmidt sought to demonstrate that the order of the paragraphs even in Mark, the oldest connected narrative source for the ministry of Jesus, was casual and arbitrary. He focused his investigation on the Markan seams which join together the separate episodes of the Gospel so that an impression is conveyed of a continuous narrative. His studies convinced him that the references to time and place, which appear to advance the narrative and which account for its coherence, do not rest upon historical memory of temporal or topographical fact. They are editorial in character. The Markan framework was not derived from the earliest tradition but was provided by the evangelist to serve the liturgical, apologetic, and missionary interests of his own community.²² The oldest tradition about Jesus consists of an abundance of individual stories which have been arranged into larger units on a theological or topical basis. Mark's Gospel, composed of such individual units of tradition, may be compared to a strand of pearls, where each pearl is held in place by the string to which it has been attached artificially. The task of criticism is to cut the string—to separate the individual units of tradition from the framework in which they currently appear—so that each of the pearls may be examined independently. Schmidt's conclusion was a frontal blow to those who had turned to the Gospel of Mark for reconstructing the course of Jesus' public ministry:

Only now and then, from considerations about the inner character of a story, can we fix these somewhat more precisely in respect to time and place. But as a whole, there is no life of Jesus in the sense of a developing biography, no chronological outline of the story of Jesus, but only independent stories, which have been put into a framework.²³

To the extent that Schmidt's work carried conviction, Mark the historian receded from the scene.

Schmidt's largely negative conclusion that Mark did not have access to any chronological or geographical framework for the career of Jesus did not go unchallenged. C. H. Dodd was highly critical of Schmidt's thesis.²⁴ The weakness of his theory of arrangement in terms of topical concerns, Dodd argued, is that it is "not a sufficient explanation of the order of the Gospel, and it is often not needed as an explanation, since the units have an inner connection with one another grounded in the facts themselves."²⁵ Moreover, the connecting summaries which Schmidt discarded as the artificial constructions of the evangelist provide a continuous narrative framework into which the episodes of the Galilean ministry fit. "So continuous a structure," Dodd urged, "scarcely arose out of casual links supplied here and there where the narrative seemed to demand it."²⁶ Dodd concluded that Mark had access to an outline of the whole ministry of Jesus which was drawn from the tradition.²⁷

²² *Ibid.*, p. 31: "If it is the case that the rise of the Christian faith can be understood only in terms of the development of Christian worship—a view which has won increasingly wide acceptance in recent years—it is clear that the rise of Christian literary activity must also be understood in relation to the experience of worship. In my opinion, the significance of the early Christian tradition of worship for the process through which the literature of the Gospels came into being cannot possibly be exaggerated."

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 317. Schmidt went so far as to assert that even the passion narrative was in its chronological and topographical framework the invention of Mark (pp. 303-309). He failed, however, to provide any explanation for Mark's creation of this particular structure of Jesus' career as the framework for this Gospel.

²⁴ C. H. Dodd, "The Framework of the Gospel Narrative," *The Expository Times*, XLIII (1931-1932), 398-400.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 400. A similar position was advanced by N. B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Guardian, 1944), pp. 28-37. Stonehouse conceded that Mark is not usually concerned to fix precisely the location and time of every episode he relates, but insists that it does not follow that Mark was indifferent to the facts of history. Moreover, "the absence of precise connections between

[p.608]

It should be recognized that there are not as many precise links to the aspects of tradition as one might suppose. This was the element of truth in Schmidt's estimate of the character of the Synoptic Gospels, including Mark. Nevertheless, this should not imply that there was an indifference to historical sequence or factual truth in the early Church. Schmidt's critical method was to play one Gospel off against another. This approach presupposes a rigid literary criticism of the Synoptic Gospels which is far too narrowly conceived because it fails to take into account the element of oral tradition which may clarify some of the differences he observed. It also fails to appreciate the distinct historical, theological, and communal concerns of each of the evangelists. The gospel could not be proclaimed apart from some framework. Since the proclamation involved a life story there was a demand for sequence, at least to some extent. But Schmidt succeeded in calling into question the assumption that Mark was a reliable source for discerning the course and vicissitudes of Jesus' mission. His work constitutes a further milestone on the road toward the modern interpretation of the Gospel of Mark.

ERNST LOHMEYER

A different direction was introduced into Markan studies with the publication in 1936 of Ernst Lohmeyer's investigation of what may be called "theological geography" in the Gospel of Mark.²⁸ R. H. Lightfoot expressed Lohmeyer's contention in clear terms:

Galilee and Jerusalem, therefore, stand in opposition to each other, as the story of the gospel runs in St. Mark. The despised and more or less outlaw Galilee is shown to have been chosen by God as the seat of the gospel and of the revelation of the Son of Man, while the sacred city of Jerusalem, the home of Jewish piety and patriotism, has become the centre of relentless hostility and sin. Galilee is the sphere of revelation, Jerusalem the scene only of rejection. Galilee is the scene of the beginning and middle of the Lord's ministry; Jerusalem only of its end.... Galilee is the land where it will receive its consummation.²⁹

Especially significant to Lohmeyer was the fact that there is reference in Mark only to Galilee in terms of the post-resurrection experience of the Church (Mk. 14:28; 16:7).

The corollary that Lohmeyer drew from his reading of the Gospel was that there were two streams of primitive Palestinian Christianity: one in Galilee, which for Mark was the true *terra Christiana*, and the other in Jerusalem. Corresponding to these two locales were two distinct christologies. The Church in Galilee viewed Jesus as the Son of Man; the

many incidents by no means proves that the connections which do exist are of the evangelist's invention" (p. 30). There is every indication that the evangelist Mark considered the connecting links between the units of tradition to be factual. For a contrary opinion see D. E. Nineham, "The Order of Events in St. Mark's Gospel—an Examination of Dr. Dodd's Hypothesis," in *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 223-239.

²⁸ E. Lohmeyer, *Galilaa and Jerusalem* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936). Lohmeyer's thesis was taken and introduced to the English-speaking world almost immediately by R. H. Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938). Since the two men develop the thesis in parallel fashion, reference will be made to the more accessible work of Lightfoot. It should be remembered, however, that Lightfoot is dependent upon Lohmeyer.

²⁹ R. H. Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine*, pp. 124f.; cf. E. Lohmeyer, op. cit., pp. 5ff.

[p.609]

Church in Jerusalem perceived him under the category of the Messiah. The most primitive christology is Galilean in character. The Jerusalem understanding of Jesus is later, as the events in Jesus' ministry were understood in the light of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Lohmeyer found the major support for his theories in the parallel passages Mark 14:28 and 16:7. On the basis of these texts he concluded that the evangelist believed that the parousia will take place in Galilee, and that it will mark the dawning of the New Age.³⁰ On this understanding, Mark 16:7 is a summons for the Markan community to proceed to Galilee in anticipation of an imminent event—the consummation.

Lohmeyer also drew support for this interpretation from Mark's concentrated focus upon Jesus' ministry in the region of Galilee. Not only is "Galilee" mentioned twelve times in the Gospel, but the evangelist Mark locates the center of Jesus' ministry in Capernaum and he situates the bulk of Jesus' activity on the shores of the Lake of Galilee. In sharp contrast, he assigns almost no ministry to Jesus in Jerusalem. The Lord goes there only to die. Behind the parts assigned to Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark Lohmeyer detected doctrinal considerations. Mark regarded Galilee as the land divinely appointed for the revelation of salvation; Judea and Jerusalem he saw as localities to be visited with judgment. The geographical details reflect not historical tradition but the distinctive theology of the evangelist.

The Lohmeyer thesis suffers from inner contradictions and a lack of sufficient evidence. Critics have urged a number of considerations which undermine the cogency of the argument. (1) Galilee, far from being the scene of revelation, is precisely the region where Jesus' messianic dignity is veiled and where the response of both the people and the disciples is characterized by misunderstanding. Although Jesus taught, exorcised demons, performed miracles, the eyes of men were not opened. During his stay in Galilee he was not recognized to be the Messiah or the Son of God. In fact, he experienced hardness of heart, unbelief and rejection. The rejection experienced in Nazareth (6:1-6) anticipates his final rejection in Jerusalem. On the other hand, although Jerusalem is the scene of Jesus' final rejection and humiliation, it is also the locale where Jesus fulfills his messianic mission of providing "a ransom for the many" (10:45). Moreover, it was in Jerusalem that Jesus' dignity as Son of God was recognized (15:39). (2) Although Mark locates a major block of Jesus' teaching in Galilee (Mark 4) and notes that Jesus frequently taught the people there, it is important not to overinterpret the evidence and argue that there was scarcely any public ministry in Jerusalem. Balancing the five accounts of controversy which are situated in Galilee (2:1-3:6) are five accounts which are located in Jerusalem (11:27-

[p.610]

³⁰ J. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 12, comments on the basic methodological error in the approach taken by Lohmeyer and Lightfoot: "the argument is not built upon what Mark clearly and repeatedly has to say, but upon inferences as to the basis of the Marcan order, a subject upon which Mark is silent." See further pp. 56-60; N. B. Stonehouse, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-49; G. H. Boobyer, "Galilee and Galileans in St. Mark's Gospel," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, XXXV (1952-1953), 334-348; L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Galilean Christianity* (Chicago: A. R. Allenson, 1956); G. Stemberger, "Galilee-Land of Salvation," in W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 409-438.

12:34). Corresponding to the notices that Jesus was teaching the people in Galilee is the statement that he was teaching daily in the Temple in Jerusalem (14:49). Moreover, the crowds who respond to Jesus' ministry in its early phases, according to Mark 3:7-8, come from Judea and Jerusalem as well as from the Galilean region.

(3) The relationship between Mark 14:28 and 16:7 is quite different from that proposed by Lohmeyer. This is evident once the passages are restored to their context. The two passages relate to each other as promise and fulfillment.

Promise

14:27 "I will smite the Shepherd" 14:28 "after I have risen"
14:28 "I will go before you into Galilee"
14:29 Special reference to Peter's anticipated failure.

Fulfillment

16:6 "Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified" 16:6 "he is risen"
16:7 "he goes before you into Galilee." 16:7 Special reference to Peter, who failed.

In context, Mark 14:28 is the promise of the regathering of the scattered flock after the resurrection. Mark 16:6-7 functions as the fulfillment of 14:27-29, and concerns not the parousia but an anticipated resurrection-appearance in Galilee.

(4) Jesus' reception in Jerusalem was more positive than Lohmeyer suggested. From Mark 11:18; 12:12; and 14:2 it is evident that the Jewish authorities were unable to take open action against Jesus because the people generally were favorably disposed toward him; and in 12:37 it is observed that the multitudes liked to listen to Jesus' teaching. The evidence suggests that Mark associates Jerusalem with hostility toward Jesus only insofar as he thinks of Jerusalem as the seat of the religious authorities.

(5) The revelation of Jesus' dignity is significantly restrained throughout the Galilean phase of Jesus' ministry (e.g. Mark 8:29, followed by verse 30; 9:2-8, followed by verses 9-13). There is no open disclosure of his dignity until 14:62, and that is situated in Jerusalem, not Galilee.

The critique which has been directed at Lohmeyer³¹ tends to demonstrate that the derivation of doctrine from geography entails a high degree of selectivity in the approach to evidence and an over-interpretation of the data. Moreover, Lohmeyer's thesis implies that Mark took a low view of the significance of history between the resurrection and the parousia. If

[p.611]

the question is asked, "Why did Mark write his Gospel with such a concentrated focus on Galilee?" a responsible reply is that the tradition upon which he was dependent was impregnated with reference to Galilee. It was Galilean in origin and it focused quite naturally upon Galilee. Nevertheless, Lohmeyer's interpretation of the geography of the Gospel of Mark has won a number of adherents to his point of view. He takes his place with Wrede and Schmidt as a creative thinker who forced other interpreters of Mark to examine the Gospel in

³¹ [Footnote missing]

terms of its theological assertion and its orientation toward a community with distinctive christological and theological perspectives.

WILLI MARXSEN

Ironically, it was the interruption in literary publications during the second World War which made possible the asking of new questions and the re-thinking of accepted positions in Synoptic studies. Among the new names whose appearance signaled a shift in emphasis in the approach to the Gospels were Gunther Bornkamm (Matthew), Hans Conzelmann (Luke), and Willi Marxsen (Mark).³²

With the publication in 1956 of Willi Marxsen's monograph, a new direction was given to Markan studies. Marxsen's concern was the evangelist Mark who first created the distinctive literary form designated "the Gospel."³³ His basic presupposition was that the well-planned, particular character of the Gospel of Mark—in contrast to the anonymous character of individual passages derived from the oral tradition—demands "an individual, an author-personality who pursues a definite goal with his work."³⁴ He reflected that the individual impetus exerted in fashioning the oldest Gospel could be estimated from the fact that, unlike Matthew and Luke, who possessed Mark's structured account, the first evangelist had at his disposal only a passion narrative, certain collections of material, and anonymous individual units of tradition. By transmitting this tradition according to a planned editing, Mark succeeded in structuring, and even restructuring, the tradition in terms of a personal formation. In subsequent research, Marxsen contended, primary consideration must be given to this formation. By that he meant the tradition as laid down within the totality of the Gospel. While form criticism had been oriented toward individual fragments of the tradition, what was distinctive of Marxsen's approach was its orientation toward the total work, in the conviction that the evangelist-redactor who edited the tradition was himself a creative person.³⁵

Marxsen designated his approach as "redaction criticism." To the extent that form-critical analysis was assumed to determine the redactor's work, redaction criticism is the child of form criticism. But it was clear that

[p.612]

the child was engaged in open revolt against the parent. Form criticism, with its interest in small units of tradition within the literary text, traced their development back to earlier stages in the tradition in order to account for their form in terms of the presumed life-setting in which they arose. The decisive question concerned the life-situation out of which a given unit of tradition emerged. The redactors or editors of the Gospels (the evangelists) were regarded as "collectors" of developed traditions who contributed almost nothing to the formation and shaping of the material. The proponents of redaction criticism are convinced that this critical reconstruction is wrong. They consider the evangelist-redactors to be the crucial figures in the

³² A convenient summary of the presuppositions, emphases and insights of these men is provided by J. Rohde, *Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), pp. 47-54, 113-140, 154-178.

³³ W. Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus-Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956; 2nd edition, 1959). English translation by R. A. Harrisville, et al., *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville; Abingdon, 1969), Page references are to the English translation.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 21f.

formation of the Synoptic Gospels. In the construction of the framework of the Gospel and in the use of techniques of style, they were guided by a conscious theological intention. Marxsen urged that it was necessary for New Testament research to move beyond the formation of individual units of tradition to the form and shaping of the canonical Gospels themselves. He defined the essential question as the determination of the life situation out of which a particular Gospel emerged.

Marxsen, therefore, investigated what K. L. Schmidt had felt was expendable, the framework of the Gospel. By framework Marxsen meant the seams, interpretive comments, summaries, modification of material, the selection and arrangement of the material, the introductions and conclusions to sections. On the basis of an examination of this framework Marxsen insisted that it is necessary to distinguish three different levels of life-situation within the Gospel of Mark: the first level is found in the nonrecurring situation of Jesus' activity; the second is provided by the situation of the church in which units of tradition circulated; the third level relates to the situation of the community in which the Gospel originated. This third level, that of the Markan community, is the particular concern of redaction criticism, on the assumption that "a literary work or fragment of tradition is a primary source for the historical situation out of which it arose, and is only a secondary source for the historical details concerning which it gives information."³⁶ Marxsen, therefore, inquires into the situation of the community in which the Gospel of Mark came into being—its point of view, its time, and even its composition. This sociological concern, however, is narrowly related to the specific interest and basic conceptions of the evangelist himself.

Without examining Marxsen's critical methodology or the conclusions to which he was led, it is important to appreciate the positive contributions that his approach has made to the study of the Gospel of Mark. (1) In contrast to the emphases of form criticism which viewed the evangelist primarily as an editor of pre-formed units of tradition, redaction criticism

[p.613]

emphasizes the creative role of the evangelist in shaping the tradition and in exercising a conscious theological purpose in preparing his Gospel. (2) While form criticism focused upon the formation of the oral tradition, redaction criticism focuses upon the completed *written* Gospel. Since oral tradition exists in the shadowy pre-history of the Gospels and is therefore ultimately irretrievable, the concentration on the written form of the Gospel in redaction criticism affords the possibility of a somewhat greater objectivity with respect to the text. (3) Because redaction criticism regards seriously the unity of the Gospels, it provides guidelines for detecting the theological intention behind the selection and arrangement of the material by an evangelist. (4) As a discipline it serves to caution the interpreter of the danger latent in the harmonization of two similar accounts and in the exposition of small independent units without consideration of the Gospel as a total work. (5) The recognition of the distinctive theological perspectives of each evangelist has encouraged a greater concern to reconstruct the life-situation which called forth the Gospels.

Marxsen's own redaction-critical study of Mark is flawed by a number of questionable assumptions that he shares with form criticism. He incorrectly assumes (1) that units of Synoptic tradition are basically anonymous in origin; (2) that the Gospels are not primary

³⁶ Ibid., p. 24, cited by Marxsen from R. Bultmann, "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem," *Journal of Religion*, VI (1926), 341.

sources for the historical details they report; and (3) that proclamation, rather than history per se, is the sphere of divine self-disclosure. These assumptions reflect a defective view of the relationship of history to revelation. God appears to act not in space-time history, but only in church proclamation. This dehistoricizing hermeneutic³⁷ obscures both the Old Testament witness to God's mighty acts in *history* and the central truth of God's Incarnation in human life and affairs.

There is no necessary reason why redaction criticism should lead to the de-historicizing of the Gospel. Marxsen's own conclusions in this regard are due not to the method he used but to the faulty presupposition that a literary work like the Gospel of Mark is a primary source for the historical situation out of which it arose, and is only a secondary source for the historical details concerning which it gives information. Historical questions are inherent in the content of early Church proclamation, while the existence of the four canonical Gospels testifies to the Church's interest in the earthly life of Jesus. The assertion that Mark made *historical events* subservient to his theological purpose demands the affirmation that there were historical events. The theological import of these events is dependent upon the activity of God in Jesus of Nazareth. While the theological significance of the historical facts must not be denied, it must also be maintained that their theological meaning is dependent upon their historical occurrence.

[p.614]

Ultimately, it is the creative life of Jesus Christ, not the evangelists or their communities, that originates, controls, and gives essential unity to the documents through which witness is borne to his achievement as the Messiah, the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

Nevertheless, Marxsen's critical studies have been programmatic for all subsequent Markan research. Although his own conclusions have been sifted and his critical method refined by more recent studies, his achievement remains a permanent contribution to the study of the Gospel of Mark. Redaction criticism provides a valid hermeneutical approach to understanding the text of Mark and the theological intention of the evangelist.

In reviewing the milestones in Markan scholarship in the twentieth century it is evident that the historicism of the Markan hypothesis was an unexamined and naive assumption. It was necessary to recognize that Mark was a Christian thinker who reflected theologically on the event of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and on its significance for his own community. Markan scholarship has tended to divorce the theological assertion in his Gospel from any historical concern on the part of the evangelist. A more balanced evaluation of the Gospel will indicate that Mark is both an historian and a theologian, and that the theology of the Gospel is

³⁷ On this see W. L. Lane, 'Redaktionsgeschichte and the De-historicizing of the New Testament Gospel,' *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XI (1968), 27-33 [on-line at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bets/vol11/redaktionsgeschichte_lane.pdf]. Two examples of Marxsen's tendency to de-historicize the text will suffice to indicate the radical character of his approach. Mark envisions John the Baptist's ministry in a wilderness locale (Mk. 1:4-8). Marxsen argues that the term "wilderness" in Mark 1:4 has no geographical significance; it has no bearing on the place where John ministered. It simply qualifies the Baptist as the one who fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Marxsen adds: "the Baptist would still be the one who appears 'in the wilderness' even if he had never been there in all his life" (op. cit., pp. 37f). Similarly, the situating of Jesus' ministry in Galilee reflects no "historical-geographical" interest: "To overstate the case, Mark does not intend to say: Jesus worked in Galilee, but rather: Where Jesus worked, there is Galilee" (ibid., pp. 93f.).

William L. Lane, "From Historian to Theologian: Milestones in Markan Scholarship," *Review & Expositor* 75.4 (Fall 1978): 601-617.

significant precisely because it is rooted in a concern with history. Within the Bible history is always interpreted, and interpretation is by necessity in such a context theological in character. That pattern controls the presentation of the apostolic proclamation concerning Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, in Mark as well. The movement from regarding Mark as an historian to the recognition of his stature as a theologian is a positive one to the degree that an interpreter continues to listen to the dialogue between history and theology within the pages of the Gospel.

© 1978 *Review & Expositor* (<http://www.rande.org/>). Reproduced by permission.

Prepared for the Web in April 2008 by Robert I Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>
